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CONCERNING DRAMA AND ORATORY IN THE SCHOOL.

THE emphasis laid by students in our day upon the kinds or species of literature ought to yield some light to those who teach children in that subject. If there is a psychic and social inevitableness in the literary kinds; if there is an unvarying range of complexity and difficulty among the species upon the same level; if there are differences among the species which indicate their adaptability to children of different ages, the trying question of choosing for the schools should have the benefit of whatever simplification and certainty may come from these facts.

In accord with what seems to be the drift of thinking about other subjects in the elementary school, the literature used in this period should be of the kind that gives a large and free sweep of activity, and that exhibits literary phenomena in their simpler, more striking aspects. Those broad and simple pictures of human life and achievement which we desire to present here we find most readily in the epic kind of literature—the ballad, the saga, the romance. The well-chosen epic story comes near to presenting a direct and unmixed interest. It lacks little of being a purely individualistic and single-minded matter, for, in it the child can follow the fortunes of his hero, the flow of incident and accomplishment, with very little diverting of his mind to side issues. There is little complication of interests, little interweaving of plot, practically no modification of motives, no introspection or analysis, none but the simplest interplay of characters.

The more striking and primary things of literary form which we desire the child to feel at this stage of his experience are to be found in the simple ballads and lyrics—poetry which, so far as its subject-matter goes, is broad and direct like the stories, and for its verse-form is of the singing kind, simple and melodic, easily set to music, easily trumpeted forth in the joyous jog-trot so dear to the elementary ear, reveling as it does in the riches of rhythm and rhyme and meter.

But in the last year (merely to set a limit) of the elementary school and in the first two years of the secondary school there comes a change. The children turn voyagers, setting sail each from his island of childhood, on a stream full of craft to be reckoned with; they make port in a busy harbor; they set foot upon crowded city streets where people stream in and out of temple and market and playhouse; dropping the figure, the child becomes conscious of the complexity of interests in life, and begins to take on his relations to the world. His studies in history have now become studies in the interweaving of human destinies, the interaction of complex factors. His own experience he now sees as a constant compromise and adjustment. Social institutions press their claims; the college looms just ahead, conditioning all his undertakings; the church makes its appeal or asserts its rights; upon all too many children the institutions of business and industry begin to call. So epic simplicity and directness no longer satisfy him as a picture of human achievement—they no longer represent life as it begins to show itself to him. Is it not, then, the right moment to introduce him to the drama, the literary drama as it is actually constituted? Of course, he will have had throughout his elementary period plays made for him, and made by himself, but these were only the epic material put into shape under the most primitive of dramatic impulses—those of dialogue and action; plays which were little more than games and little other than speechifying. But now he has, perhaps, his first moment of real ripeness for the characteristic dramatic things, such as the clash and combination of institutions with one another, the revolt of the individual against the institution, with his final ruin or adjustment, the claim of law and an impersonal moral order, the interweaving of interests and motives, the evolution of character under the action of these larger influences and the action of other characters. In short, have his own experiences not now prepared him for what is in art the most characteristic presentation of the complex of human society—the literary drama? Luckily, there are in the literary drama grades and shades of complexity, and a wide range of choice as to the nature and difficulty

of the problems involved. One would scarcely encourage the eighth-grade child or the high-school freshman to attack the intricate adjustment and interplay of *Hamlet*; he would surely not be expected to follow the baffling complexities of social, personal, and economic considerations through *The Pillars of Society*. But *The Merchant of Venice* offers problems and situations that he can understand; in *Julius Cæsar*, in *Wilhelm Tell*, in the *Wallenstein* plays, in *Macbeth*, noble and finished dramas as they are, he encounters nothing too mature or complex for his comprehension and appreciation. On the contrary, the ideas and situations are precisely those that satisfy his interest, and legitimately enlarge his horizon.

In matters of form the child at this period is ready to pass from the simple music of lyric and ballad. He can readily appreciate the more delicate and remote effects of dramatic verse; and he should now have a chance to learn the sonorous and lofty music of impassioned prose. Now, if ever, he has his prime hour of readiness for the orators, both because the subject-matter of the orations appeals to him as never before, and perhaps as it never will again, since he is now for the first time interested in social and political questions of the kind with which the orators deal, and since, as he goes on, he will probably grow less accessible to the emotional appeal made by oratory; and because he needs the artistic enlargement and satisfaction that he would get from the musical flow of eloquent prose.

And the significance of the fact that oratory and the drama are primarily and predominantly spoken literature should be always in view. The very fundamental fact of literary form, that it is intended to reach us through the ear and not through the eye, has almost dropped out of consciousness, so deep has been our long enslavement to the printed book. Literature should, in the nature of the case, have been the first of the disciplines to be emancipated from the printed book, instead of being, as it is, almost the last. But all the signs point to such an emancipation, and toward a revival of oral literature. In such a revival the teacher of literature can materially assist by training children, at the hour of their first readiness for them, in oratory and in drama.

Such a training calls for a close correlation of the studies in literature at this period with the training in vocal and dramatic expression—in acting and speaking. Such a correlation would free the discipline in expression from the stigma of being mere elocution. It would put behind the children a vital reality which they desired to express, and it would open a suitable avenue for the active side of the work, so essential in the study of literature. It would do something to free the children's literature from that unreasonable connection with composition in which it has suffered so much. If, instead of producing stale or crude literary criticism, as our children now too often do by way of themes saddled upon their literature, they were learning to render with intelligence, with taste, with emotion, the words of the masters themselves, great would be the gain to the children in interest and sincerity, and incalculable the beneficent effect upon the literary and dramatic art of the future.

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